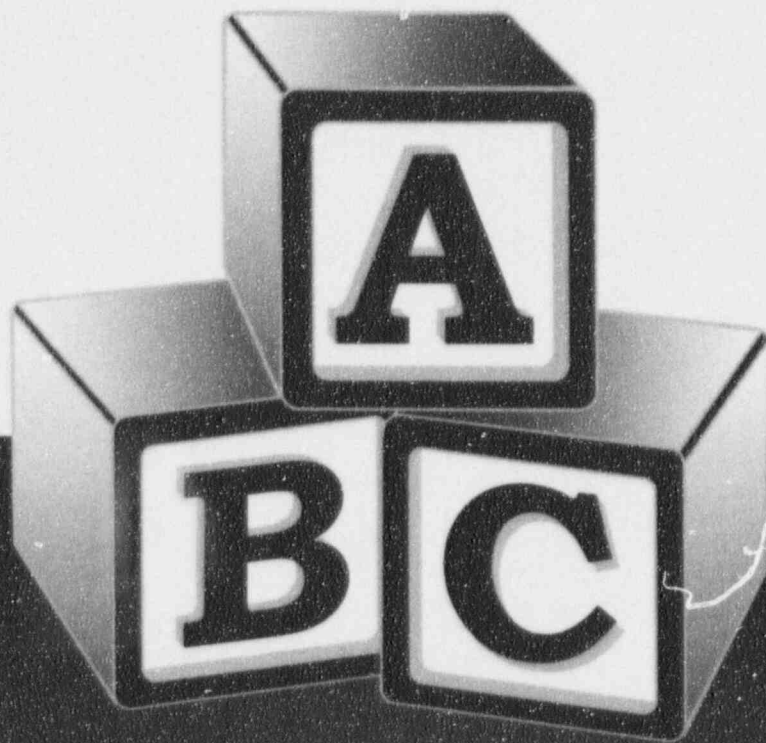


The ABCs of Better CORRESPONDENCE

AN IN-HOUSE GUIDE
TO HELP YOU CREATE
EFFECTIVE OFFICIAL
CORRESPONDENCE

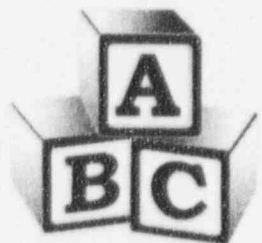
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The ABCs of Better CORRESPONDENCE

AN IN-HOUSE GUIDE
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Welcome to the NRC's Desktop Correspondence Guide.

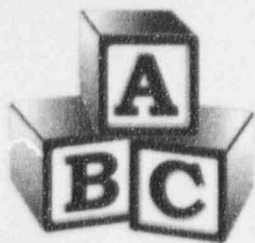
This guide is designed to help you improve the quality of the letters you draft to Members of Congress, the general public, the nuclear industry, petitioners, environmental groups, and others. It is brief and designed to serve as a reminder rather than as a teacher.

This guide also supplements the NRC's new, one-day quality of correspondence course.

The guide covers the following topics:

- Assessing incoming correspondence
- Gathering information
- Organizing information
- Writing the letter

The final section is the Handy Handbook.



Why a desktop guide to correspondence?

This question grew out of the agency's public responsiveness initiative to improve the timeliness and quality of agency correspondence. The quality of NRC correspondence directly reflects the agency's responsiveness to the concerns of the public. When the Commission heard of plans to develop a desktop letter-writing guide, one Commissioner commented, "The trouble with desktop guides is that that's where they tend to stay – on the desk, unopened and unused."

That gave the working group tasked with developing the guide a goal: to develop a desktop guide that will be opened and that will be used. The best way to do this, we decided, was to develop a guide that was different from the usual NRC publication – different in format, different in style, different in content. Of course, we also wanted to produce a user-friendly document, relevant to the NRC, that addresses real NRC correspondence issues and provides accurate and practical advice.

The guide may look simplistic. It's supposed to. We want you to pick it up and quickly locate what you're looking for. We've also used actual examples of incoming and outgoing correspondence, but modified them to protect the writers' identities.

Many of you don't *need* the information in this guide. You're already good writers. In that case, this guide may serve as a brief refresher. Others of you may benefit from reviewing selected parts of the guide – that's why we've made it easy to skim through.

We hope that the guide will help improve the quality of NRC correspondence, and we hope that you do open and read it.

The Quality of Correspondence Working Group



Assessing Incoming Correspondence



Assessing Incoming Correspondence

Remember when you first started studying math in elementary school, and you learned how to do those dreaded word problems? The key to solving these problems was to read each one carefully to determine the real question so that you could properly set up the equation. That technique is also the key to success in drafting correspondence: you have to read and assess incoming correspondence very carefully before you can begin to draft an appropriate response. To assess the incoming correspondence, answer the following questions:

A Who wrote the letter? To whom is it addressed?

The identity of the letter writer is the key to the style and content of your response. All letters deserve a thoughtful response, but a letter from a senior scientist will elicit a response that will differ from your response to a letter from a child in elementary school. The agency receives letters from both kinds of correspondents—and all sorts in between.

B What is the writer saying? What does the writer want to know?

Many letter writers ask one or more specific questions. Carefully list or underline each question so that you can be sure to cover each one in your response.

Other correspondents want general information. "Please send me information about NRC inspections," one recent letter began. Giving such letters a somewhat general response is all right. We want to be responsive to individuals, but we are not required to do an individual's research. However, we can refer them to some of the material cited on page 25. Still others may not want information; they want to tell the NRC how they feel about a particular subject. This response will be easy to write; a polite acknowledgment will usually do the trick.

C What does the writer expect in response?

From time to time, you will receive a letter from an individual or group that expects more than a letter in response. The request may be for a visit or for a telephone call, or it may be for informational brochures. Again, be sure you read the letter carefully, take note of any such requests, and either provide the requested response (by including, for instance, informational brochures) or explain why the request cannot be met. For example, "Although I am not able to meet with you personally, I assure you that I welcome your interest and value your opinion...."

D What is the writer's attitude?

Don't let yourself be influenced inappropriately by the writer's attitude. This can be difficult at times. An irate or misinformed letter writer may arouse your anger and, in turn, influence the content and tone of your response. Don't let that happen. Your job is to be professional and thorough — regardless of the tone of the incoming letter.

Turn to the next pages to see three sample assessments.

Assessing a Sample Letter from a Senator

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510-4201

August 29, 19XX

Honorable Dr. Shirley Jackson
Chairman
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, DC 20555

Dear Chairman:

I am writing to relay several concerns related to the renewal of NRC licenses for the XYZ Corporation (XYZ) of Provo, Utah.

I have followed with interest a U. S. Department of the Army procurement for certain supplies and the Army's consideration of environmental remediation costs relative to the contract. The Army intends to ensure that its vendors have complied with NRC rules to set aside funds for decommissioning sites. Further, the Army is not liable for the cleanup of sites which the Army does not own or where it does not have direct operational control over production.

I understand that XYZ was required to and did submit a Decommissioning Funding Plan (DFP) for the possible future decommissioning of its facility. I have been advised that in this plan XYZ asserts that inasmuch as 96 percent of the materials that generated the DFP requirements were processed for the United States Government, decommissioning and financial obligations lie with the Government. I further understand the company has not produced written assurance to this effect, as NRC requested, but has stated that the assumption of government liability is based on past experience. However, the Army does not consider environmental remediation costs in its evaluation of the proposal since it requires that each company meet NRC rules relative to decommissioning.

I am very concerned that, in order to renew its NRC licenses, XYZ is assuming the Federal Government will cover the costs of site decommissioning. This contract interests me because one of the current suppliers for these penetrators is located in my State. Moreover, I have been approached by many senior Department of Defense officials expressing concern about the large percentage of their budget which has been committed to environmental remediation. I believe companies should be held accountable for their own environmental stewardship, and I would like to ensure as much as possible that no costs over and above the Army's budget for this solicitation are unnecessarily incurred.

I would appreciate your looking into this matter and making every effort to ensure XYZ is held accountable for all requirements for renewal of the licenses. I would further appreciate your providing me with a report on the matter.

Thank you for your courtesy and assistance. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Adam Smith
United States Senator

Assessing a Sample Letter from a Senator

A Who wrote the letter? To whom is it addressed?

In this case, the writer is a member of the United States Senate. It is a letter that contains a good deal of factual material and was sent to the Chairman.

B What is the writer saying? What does the writer want to know?

In brief, the Senator is saying this: You, NRC, are reviewing a license renewal request from a firm that wants to supply certain equipment to the Army. However, the price it is proposing to the Army doesn't include the cost of possible decommissioning, and the firm has said that decommissioning costs should be paid by the Army. By not including these costs, XYZ's bid is low and XYZ may get the job. I am concerned about this for two reasons. First, one of XYZ's competitors for this contract is from my State and will probably lose out on the contract because of XYZ's low bid. Second, the Army budget is tight already and the Army shouldn't get stuck with having to pay the decommissioning bill; that should be the responsibility of the supplier.

C What does the writer expect in response ?

In this case, the Senator is specific. He wants to make sure that the NRC is fully aware of what is really going on here. Then he wants us to look into the matter to know what we are doing and to advise him of the outcome.

D What is the writer's attitude?

Positive and professional. He might want the NRC to deny the license renewal to XYZ so that his constituent might benefit, but he is not asking for that. Instead he is giving NRC specific information he feels should be considered in the evaluation of the XYZ renewal package.

Assessing a Sample Straightforward Letter from a Citizen



Wednesday, March 1, 19XX

Mrs. Luzznn Jones

A. K. A. Honey Jones

Route 2

Bayou, Louisiana 99209

A

President Andrew Bateson
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D. C.

Dear President Bateson:

Fire is the great purifier! Therefore, send all nuclear waste to the sun. Use disposable rockets.

B

Nuclear waste volume and weight are small, so the rockets could be small. To protect our population, while the rocket is loaded, encapsulate the bunkers that house the rockets in lead.

C

The nuclear waste on the rockets temporarily needs to be contained, i. e., only a few hours. So probably a lesser radiation shield would be required than now used when it's buried on earth because here it must be shielded against hundreds of years of decay.

NASA has scientists who can figure out the details.

Please consider this. Life is precious! Thanks for listening!

D

Respectfully & sincerely,
Mrs. Honey Jones

Assessing a Sample Straightforward Letter from a Citizen

A Who wrote the letter? To whom is it addressed?

The writer is a member of the general public, a citizen who appears to be sincerely concerned about the problem of nuclear waste disposal and has decided to write to the President of the United States. The fact that her letter is handwritten on flowered stationery suggests the personal nature of her interest.

B What is the writer saying? What does the writer want to know?

The writer believes that she has a solution to a problem about which she has read or heard and about which she is concerned. Some of the material in the letter indicates that she has some very general knowledge of the subject, and she has used innate intelligence and logic to devise a solution to the problem. She is saying she wants to help.

C What does the writer expect in response?

She hopes that she has solved the problem of nuclear waste disposal. She has asked for nothing specific and probably expects nothing. But her letter should be answered. She should receive a response that includes a general explanation of how waste is handled and of NRC's role in ensuring the health and safety of the public.

D What is the writer's attitude?

Warm, friendly, concerned, but positive. Her letter conveys sincerity.

Assessing a More Complex Letter from a Citizen

October 6, 19XX
Contee, Oklahoma

Chairman of NRC Shirley Jackson

Some of the casks being used have serious problems that the public is increasingly becoming alarmed about. With three levels of oversight (vendor, plant, and NRC) we are now faced with a crack in the weld that needs to be unloaded after one month's use on a cask that should have lasted 50 years. At your NRC meeting of August 25 it was said that this is a black eye on the system. Yes it is, and a black eye delivered to the public as well. This is only a small part of the great list of problems with these casks. All three levels of oversight are to blame. Many of us have been following the NRC public documents on this issue, and it is clear that there are flaws in the rulemaking procedures, in the certification, in the SER for the design itself, and in the use of the design. The total would fill volumes.

1. The code of regulations was not followed. Casks shouldn't be built before they are certified, but you made an exception here.
 2. The transfer cask was not given an exception but apparently it was built before it was certified because it was used just a few days after certification.
 3. The transfer cask was built by a subcontractor who wasn't inspected the year the cask was built.
 4. The previous subcontractor on the cask job had problems but wasn't inspected again until two years later.
 5. The transfer cask has shims inside the shield lid inside the cask. There is nothing in the unloading procedures referencing these shims. This is a problem.
 6. The vendor wanted generic certification of the cask, even though it is well known that at other sites the design had to be changed, and then within a month after certification, the vendor started asking for changes.
 7. As you know I wrote numerous letters to NRC over a long period of time and finally wrote to you. Only then did I finally get told that the issue needed clarifying. Someone on your staff told me that first they thought this was a licensing thing but now they think it is a rulemaking thing. Will there be rulemaking on this issue? If so, when?
 8. When the public became aware that the bottom of the cask could corrode, we wanted assurances that this problem would be solved and that the tiles used to solve this problem were well analyzed. Finally this was done but now we are worried about the adhesive that is going to be used to hold the tiles in place. We are worried about a cask that depends on adhesive in order to function properly over fifty years.
 9. In this generic ruling you are trying to use a cask at a reactor site using much of the previous reactor site analysis. This is like comparing apples and oranges.
- If the vendor were reliable, little oversight would be needed. If the utility were vigilant, no flawed cask would be loaded. If NRC did its job, close inspections would follow violations to see that they were corrected in a timely manner and all subcontractors would be inspected. With the mess this design is in and the huge controversy over the generic ruling, I certainly don't want to see this cask used. I am supposed to feel safe with a cask like this? I don't! I suggest you review this cask very carefully and your generic rule. Neither is working right. I'd like a response from you on this situation.

Suzie Miller

Assessing a More Complex Letter from a Citizen

A Who wrote the letter? To whom is it addressed?

The writer is a member of the general public; she does not indicate an affiliation with any specific group. She also indicates that she has written to the NRC many times previously.

B What is the writer saying? What does the writer want to know?

The writer has many concerns about the approval of certain waste-storage casks. She says, in the last paragraph, that she simply doesn't want to see them used. She wants NRC to review the cask design very carefully and deny the application.

C What does the writer expect in response?

She wants to hear exactly what the NRC is doing to address her concerns—in this case, no small request.

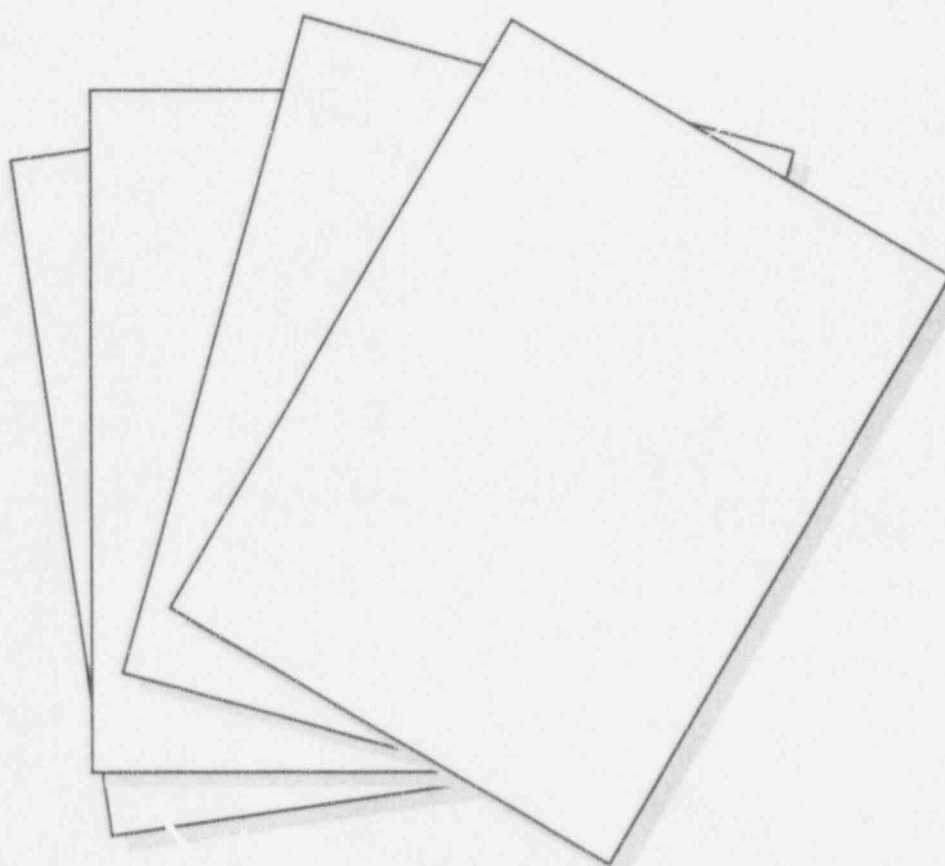
D What is the writer's attitude?

Negative, somewhat hostile toward the NRC, the cask manufacturer, and the utilities. Nonetheless, she has taken the time to express her concerns in detail.

Notes:



Gathering Information



Facts must come first. If you are asked to draft a letter, you probably know the basic facts of the issue, but you may need some additional information. In particular, you should be sure to determine what, if anything, the Commission or senior agency executives have said on the issue recently. Here are some specific suggestions as to where you might find the information you need:

1 Branch Offices

Your Branch office may well have much of the background material you need. You may also want to check with other Branches responsible for issues to be addressed in the letter. Branch offices are a particularly good source of "boilerplate." (Boilerplate is standard language that is used repeatedly in discussions of a particular topic in publications, speeches, letters, or other publicly available documents.)

2 *Citizen's Guide to NRC Information* (NUREG/BR-0010, Rev. 2)

This brochure describes sources of agency information available in printed and electronic form. You may want to reference some of these sources in your response, or you may want to include a copy of one or more of them with your response.

3 Colleagues

Brainstorming with colleagues may be the way to begin. Sit down with one or more of them and share ideas and opinions. And take good notes.

4 Computer Databases

NRC computer databases, NUDOCs, and any subsequent agency-wide system, can provide technical information or lead you to the information you need. You can also check the NRC Media Briefing Papers on the agency LAN. (Talk to your Office computer coordinator if you need assistance.)

5 *NRC Information Digest* (NUREG-1350)

This booklet is an excellent source for general data about the nuclear industry in the United States and about NRC activities in general.

6 NRC Library

This facility, in Two White Flint North, includes many volumes of interest. Its trained staff can help you locate other material through its interlibrary loan agreements.

7 Office of Public Affairs

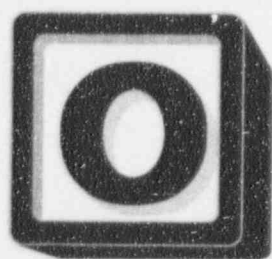
OPA can provide copies of press releases that the agency has issued on specific subjects, as well as copies of speeches given by the Chairman and the Commissioners. OPA also has brochures and fact sheets that you may use as reference material or include with your letter.

8 WorldWideWeb/FedWorld/Netscape

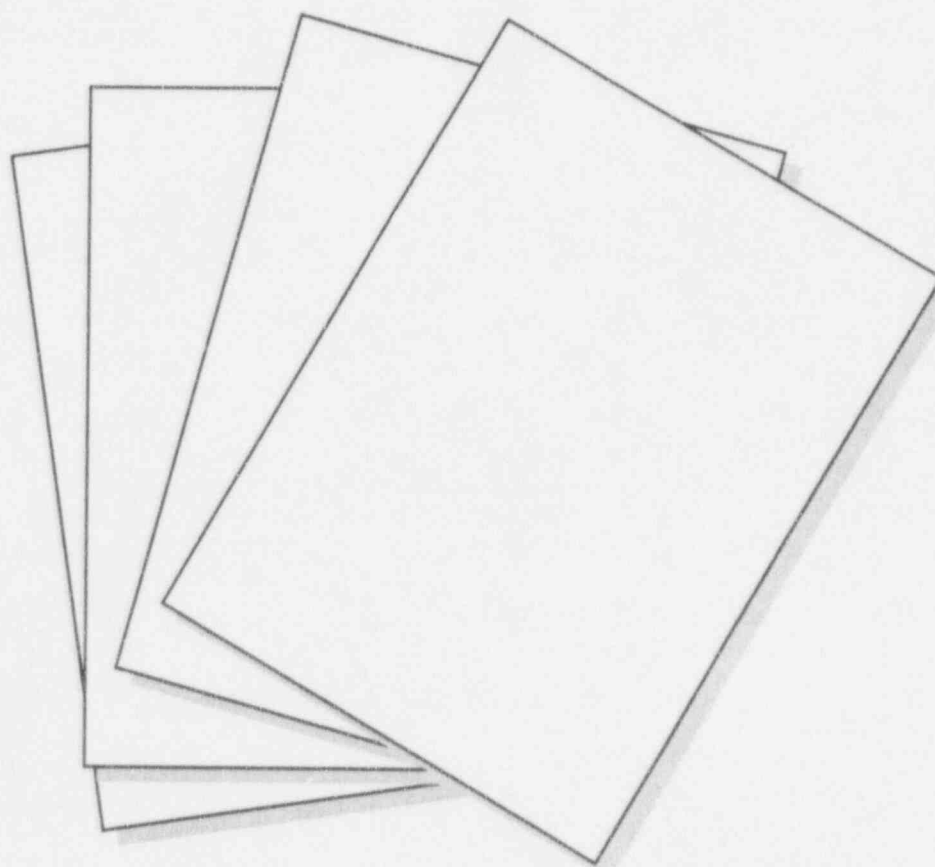
Netscape is an icon-based computer software system that can put you in touch with vast resources that address a multitude of subjects. If you do not yet have access to this software, discuss getting it with your supervisor and the Office of Information Resources Management.

For a listing of published sources of information that may be helpful or that you may want to reference or include in your response, see page 25.

Now let's do something with those facts. Turn to Page 11.



rganizing Information



Organizing Information

Now that you've assessed the incoming correspondence and found the information you need to draft your response—



Resist the temptation to begin drafting your response right away. You're not ready yet. Before you begin to write, take time to organize the information.

A Structure your response.

Your letter should have an opening, a middle, and a closing. The easiest way to ensure this is to organize your thoughts before you begin writing. This doesn't have to be a formal process. Just jotting down a list of major points with examples and supporting data, where appropriate, will usually suffice. The key is to organize these points into a logical order that best responds to the incoming. How do you do this?

B Take your lead from the incoming letter.

Item B on page 1 suggests that you make a list of the questions the writer asks. Begin with that list, and using the information you have gleaned, write your answer to each question. If the incoming was logically organized and asked a series of discrete questions, you need do no more to organize your response than to answer them in the same order in which they were asked. Otherwise

C Organize by logic.

Organize your response according to some logical plan. In some cases, you may want to organize it by subject matter, presenting all the information on one subject before you go on to another; in other cases, organizing information in chronological order may be appropriate. In any case, have a plan before you begin.

D Remember: "One thought, one paragraph."

Make it easy for your reader and yourself. Each paragraph should address just one topic. The paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that states the subject or core idea of the paragraph. In responding to incoming correspondence, that topic sentence often will address a specific question or concern raised in the incoming. The remainder of the paragraph presents the supporting information—facts, policy, procedures, practices—that responds to the question or concern.

Now turn the page for several examples.

Beginning and Ending Letters

Sample Openings

"Dear Senator Smith:

I am responding to your letter to the Chairman, dated August 29, 19XX, expressing your concern about the pending request to renew the license issued XYZ Fabricators, Inc...."

"Dear Representative Jones:

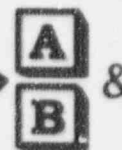
I am enclosing the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's responses to your questions on how the agency would be affected by H. R. 994, the Regulatory Sunset and Review Act of 1994...."

"Dear Representative Thompson:

I am responding to your September 2, 19XX, letter that forwarded a letter from your constituent, Sam Browne, in which Mr. Browne requests information about the South Dade Nuclear Power Plant...."

"Dear Mrs. Wilson:

Thank you for your letter of September 24, 19XX. We are always pleased to hear about exceptional service provided by our employees in their line of duty...."



Sample Closings

"We are reviewing your concerns regarding these issues and will inform you of the results of our review when it is completed.

Sincerely,"

"We appreciate this opportunity to provide the NRC's comments on this legislation. If the Commission can be of further assistance to you or your staff, please contact Harold Wasburg, Director of Congressional Affairs, at 301-415-1776.

Sincerely,"

"Thank you for the information. If you have any additional questions, please contact me at 610-357-5000.

Sincerely,"

"If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,"

"Thank you for sharing your views with us.

Sincerely,"



Beginning and Ending Letters

A Structure your response.

The **beginning** of the letter sets the tone and concisely summarizes the purpose of the letter; do not recapitulate every point mentioned in the incoming letter.

The **closing** should be cordial and indicate what, if any, further action NRC will take. Whenever appropriate, the name of an NRC contact should be provided.

B Take your lead from the incoming letter.

Note how the openings and closings on page 12 vary. It is important that they be appropriate to the incoming letter. For instance, it would be inappropriate to begin your response to a highly critical or angry letter with "Thank you for your letter of" Letters from the Chairman or Commissioners to senior government officials or Members of Congress should ordinarily be quite formal. The final closing shown on page 12 was used in response to a letter similar to the example on page 4 and was quite appropriate to the incoming.

Organizing the Body of the Letter

"You requested information on the offsite reception centers at nuclear power plants. Because most of the information you requested is found in the offsite emergency plans and procedures, we have referred your request to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which is the lead Federal agency for offsite emergency planning and preparedness. It is our understanding that FEMA is compiling the information and will respond to you shortly."

A

"You also expressed concerns about the criteria NRC uses in determining 'reasonable assurance' and the evaluation of the adequacy of reception centers. We are continuing to review these concerns and will inform you of the results of our review when it is completed...."

B

"As authorized by Section 274b of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended, the NRC entered into an Agreement with the State of New York whereby the State assumed regulatory authority over the use of certain categories of radioactive materials, while NRC jurisdiction is retained in some cases.. Within the State, licensing of byproduct materials and compliance with applicable regulatory requirements are delegated to four departments: New York State Department of Health, New York State Department of Labor, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and New York City Department of Health...."

C

"The Commission believes that absent substantial amendment, the legislation could have the unintended effect of creating regulatory instability and would impose additional costs on our Agreement States.... We also believe that the legislation would force the NRC to expend significant resources to ensure compliance with the bill's requirements....."

D

"In addition, the bill is unclear as to how rulemaking itself is to be accomplished under the legislation and as to which agency statement will be subject to the sunset and review requirements....."

Organizing the body of the Letter

A Your letter should have an opening, a middle, and a closing.

We've just looked at some distinct openings and closings. Now let's look at the **middle or body** of some letters. The middle or body of the letter contains the message you want to convey. It should be concise but complete and organized so that it can be readily understood by the recipient. See some examples on the following pages. Note that they are concise and straightforward.

B Take your lead from the incoming letter.

The incoming letter can help you with organization of the body of the response. By summarizing the concerns raised, you can get a start on your reply.

C Organize by logic.

The third example on page 14 was written in response to a detailed, somewhat rambling incoming letter. The response is easy to understand because it is written according to a predetermined plan. In this case, the writer has started at the beginning, with the Act that established the existing procedures and then gone on to the present status. It is a logical, chronological flow.

D Remember: "One thought, one paragraph."

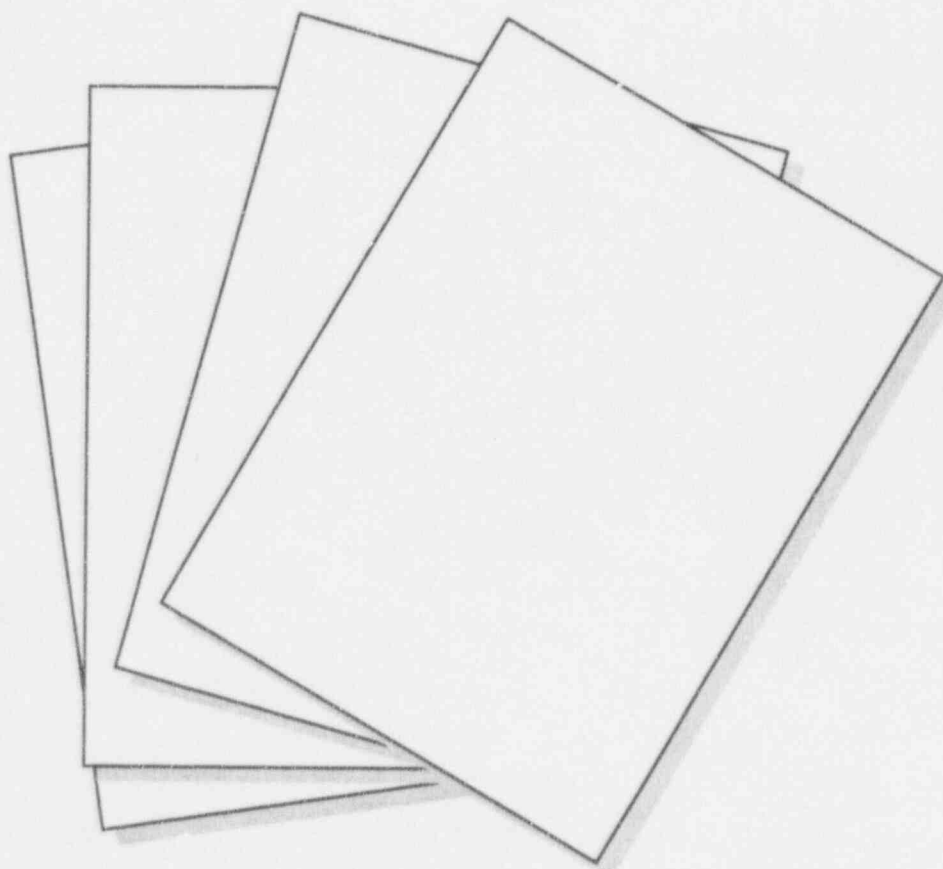
In the final example on page 14, taken from an actual reply to a Congressman, the first paragraph of the body of the letter deals with financial concerns, the second with procedural ones.

Finally, let's use the blocks to build our response.

Notes:



riting the Letter



Writing the Letter

It's time to write, and you may not have a lot of time.

Deadlines are a fact of life at the NRC. Once you've finished with the preliminaries, it's time to draft the letter. If you have the information and a sense of how to organize it, the writing will not be difficult. Here are some steps to follow:

A Consider who will sign the letter.

Most letters you write will be signed by someone else. Determine the signer's style preferences. Ask to see examples of previously issued correspondence and emulate that style.

B Be careful with tone.

Don't be condescending or contentious. Keep all letters neutral and professional. People who write to the NRC have serious concerns about nuclear power or the use or disposal of nuclear materials. We must assure them that we share their concerns while at the same time communicating accurately and forthrightly information about the subject of their concerns and our role as responsible regulators.

C Remember who may read the letter.

The truth is, anyone in the world may read it. Correspondence on NRC letterhead is fair game for everyone, including the media. Most likely your letter won't be quoted on the front page of *The Washington Post*, but you shouldn't be shocked if it is. The statements of NRC officials routinely appear in local media around the country and, not infrequently, in the national media.

D Be sure the letter is understandable to the intended reader.

As noted above, just about anyone could eventually read any NRC letter. However, you don't have to write every letter so that it can be understood by everyone. A letter should be appropriate for its primary intended recipient. For instance, a letter to a professor at a scientific institution could appropriately include much more technical material than a letter addressed to an elementary school student.

E Give only the information requested and give it objectively.

Making your response as concise as appropriate serves two purposes. It reduces the likelihood of error and it saves time – yours and the reader's. Too much unrequested information could even bewilder or irritate the requester. Give the relevant facts as objectively as possible. You are writing as a member of the NRC staff and must reflect official – not personal – positions.

F Use boilerplate or attachments whenever feasible.

Don't "reinvent the wheel." Check Branch files. If someone else has written a letter on the subject you are asked to answer – and that letter has gone through official concurrence – use as much as possible of the material already approved. You will save yourself time, decrease the possibility of error, and increase the probability that your letter will be quickly approved. However, you must be careful. Seldom is boilerplate *entirely* appropriate to your document. You must read it carefully and adapt it to the style, tone, audience, and particular purpose of your document. In other cases, if the agency has a brochure or press release that appropriately addresses the issue, make that the meat of your response (see page 25 for a listing of such material). Then your letter need only acknowledge the incoming correspondence and reference your attachment.

Notes:

Reviewing Some Guidelines

G Write first, polish later.

Put your thoughts down as quickly as you can. Present the information in the same way you would if you were speaking to the person face to face. At this point, don't worry about form or grammar, sentence structure or spelling; just write. Once you have all your thoughts drafted, go back to the beginning of the letter and make the necessary refinements.

H Structure sentences with care.

Avoid long, multi-clause sentences that may be difficult for the reader to understand. Make most sentences simple, and generally write in the active voice. You may use long sentences sparingly to avoid the monotony of too many short, simple sentences strung together. But, when you write longer sentences, be careful to structure them correctly so that subjects and verbs agree and primary ideas are distinct from subordinate ones.

I Use parallel structure to convey matching ideas.

When you construct a list of people, or activities, or concepts, always use the same format within the list, giving each item equal weight and expressing it in the same grammatical form. If you cannot do this, rewrite the material so you can separate the items.

J Use correct punctuation.

Punctuation rules are like traffic laws. Unless you obey them you have chaos. A misplaced comma or semicolon can completely change the meaning of a sentence. Remember that simple sentences with simple punctuation are often the most understandable. (See the Handy Handbook, page 25.)

K Don't forget spell check.

This is a good time in the writing process to use your computer's spell-check feature. It will help you find some typographical errors. However, it's only an aid. It won't tell you if you've used "you" when you should have used "your." You still have to read your letter carefully to make sure that it is correct.

L Take a break, then read it again.

When you have finished your draft and polished it, take a break; an hour or so is good, a day even better. Then reread it. Is it correct? Are the sentences clear and direct? Should a long sentence become two shorter – and clearer – ones? Is the punctuation correct? Can you eliminate excess words? (You can often eliminate adjectives and adverbs. Let the facts speak for themselves, without trimming.)

M Include a contact name and telephone number.

This is the easiest guideline to follow, and sometimes could be the most important. Often a letter will prompt another question, or a request for additional information. A contact name and telephone number will save time and eliminate frustration. The letter recipient will know where to direct any questions. Other NRC staff members – from telephone operators on – won't get calls they don't know how to handle.

Writing Some Sample Responses



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON D.C. 20555-0001

September 5, 19XX

The Honorable Adam Smith
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Smith:

I am responding to your letter to the Chairman dated August 29, 19XX, expressing your concern regarding the renewal of NRC licenses for the XYZ Corporation and financial assurance issues related to environmental remediation.

The NRC staff is paying close attention to the financial issues related to the renewal of licenses for the XYZ Corporation. NRC regulations regarding financial assurance are very specific and require a formal written financial instrument. However, NRC may authorize exceptions to these regulations if appropriate justification is provided.

NRC did not receive a satisfactory response from XYZ in regard to financial assurance for appropriate environmental remediation. Therefore, on June 21, 19XX, NRC sent a formal Demand for Information to XYZ. XYZ responded on July 1, 19XX, and the NRC staff is reviewing that response. We expect to complete the review and respond to XYZ within the next 60 days. We intend to ensure that XYZ has provided either adequate and appropriate binding financial assurance that it can meet its responsibilities or has provided a sufficiently rigorous justification for an exception.

In addition to these actions on financial assurance, the staff is reviewing the technical information provided by XYZ in support of its request for license renewal. As a result of its initial review, the NRC staff asked XYZ for additional information and is now evaluating XYZ's response. Concurrently the staff is conducting an Environmental Assessment. The combined results of these reviews will be used as the bases for the license renewal decision. We will be pleased to send you a copy of the related reports when they are completed.

I trust this reply responds to your concerns. If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to let me know. You may also direct any questions to Josephine Brown at 301-415-5555.

Sincerely,

Harvey Jones
Executive Director
for Operations

A

B

C

D

E

F

Writing Some Sample Responses

A Consider who will sign the letter.

In this case, although the original letter was addressed to the Chairman, the response will be signed by the EDO.

B Be careful with tone.

In this case, the tone is formal, professional, and official, as would be expected in an exchange of correspondence between two high-level officials.

C Remember who may read the letter.

Although the letter is addressed to the Senator, it is likely to be read by many other people, including the firm that is competing with XYZ, officials of the Department of the Army (see the incoming letter on page 2), and, depending on the local significance of the issue, possibly the media in the Senator's home State.

D Be sure the letter is understandable to the intended reader.

You can expect the intended readers of this letter to understand such terms as "financial assurance," "financial instrument," and "environmental remediation," so their use in this response is perfectly correct. However, if you were writing to a member of the general public, you might say something like, "NRC will ensure that XYZ has the money available to clean up the site. This money would have to be put in a trust account in a bank and could be in the form of cash or securities."

E Give only the information requested and give it objectively.

This letter does well in that regard. It gives the facts and does not speculate on possible results.

F Use boilerplate or attachments whenever feasible.

The language regarding financial assurances is standard, but it is used well in this letter. The letter also promises a followup — to send the completed reports. The text of the followup letter can be very brief: "In my September 5, 1995, letter to you regarding XYZ Corporation, I stated that when our staff studies were complete, I would send a copy of those reports to you. Those reports are included with this letter. If you have any further questions"

Writing Some Sample Responses



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON D.C. 20555-0001

November 8, 19XX

Ms. Suzie Miller
3054 Pawnee Street
Contee, Ok 74500

Dear Ms. Miller:

I am responding to your letter of October 6, 19XX, to the Chairman, in which you raise a number of issues about transfer cases and related regulations. A review of our files indicates that we have already addressed many of these issues in letters to you or in telephone conversations between you and members of our staff. In addition, the staff of the NRC Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation is preparing a letter in response to your three letters on the subject of dry cask storage. You can expect to receive that letter within the next month.

The 10 CFR Part 72 license approach has elicited many letters from the public. We try to review each letter quickly and then to study it carefully to identify any safety issues that may not have been known to the staff. We respond as soon as we can, within our budget and staff limits. We remain committed to our mission to protect the public health and safety. Please be assured that we will continue to closely monitor cask fabrication and use through our regular inspection program. We will also continue to verify that the firms involved are taking appropriate actions to correct findings from previous inspections.

If you need further information, you may contact Henry Greer of my staff at 301-555-1123.

G

H

I

J



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON D.C. 20555-0001

April 3, 19XX

Mrs. Luann Jones
Route 2
Bayou, LA 99209

Dear Mrs. Jones:

Your letter March 1, 19XX, to President Bateson suggested that nuclear waste be disposed of by launching it, via rocket, into the sun. One of the strengths of our nation is the concern private citizens such as yourself have about the issues we face.

You will be interested to know that in 1980 scientists from the Department of Energy investigated the possibility you propose. However, they concluded that the possibility of failure of such a mission was too high; a failure could result in an unacceptable release of radioactivity into the Earth's environment. A British study commission on environmental pollution reached the same conclusion. We believe these conclusions remain valid.

I am enclosing with this letter some fact sheets and brochures I believe you will find of interest. I appreciate your sharing your suggestion and your concern. If you need any further information, you may call Sue White of my staff at 301-555-9213.

Sincerely,

K

L

M

Writing Some Sample Responses

G Write first, polish later.

This advice is particularly valid when you are drafting the answer to a complex letter.

H Structure sentences with care.

Clear writing is always important, but it is most important when you are writing to someone who is hostile. You want to be doubly sure that everything you write can be readily understood and is not likely to be misinterpreted. You must also avoid making promises that may not be possible to keep.

I Use parallel structure to convey matching ideas.

Note the construction of this sentence: "We try to review ..., to identify..., and to respond...." In another sentence, we might say, "The responsibilities include reviewing ..., identifying ..., and responding" Usually, either form is acceptable, but be consistent whichever form is used – in a sentence, in a paragraph, and in a document.

J Use correct punctuation.

In a simple, direct letter, very little punctuation is needed. However, make sure that you do use whatever is required to meet the rules of grammar and to make the letter understandable to its intended reader.

K Don't forget spell check.

But remember its limitations. A word may be spelled correctly – but it may be the wrong word. Spell check can supplement but not replace your own careful reading.

L Take a break, then read it again.

Are you saying everything you want to say, in the way you want to say it? Have you answered all the concerns in the incoming letter? Is the information appropriate for the recipient? Can you simplify a sentence or two?

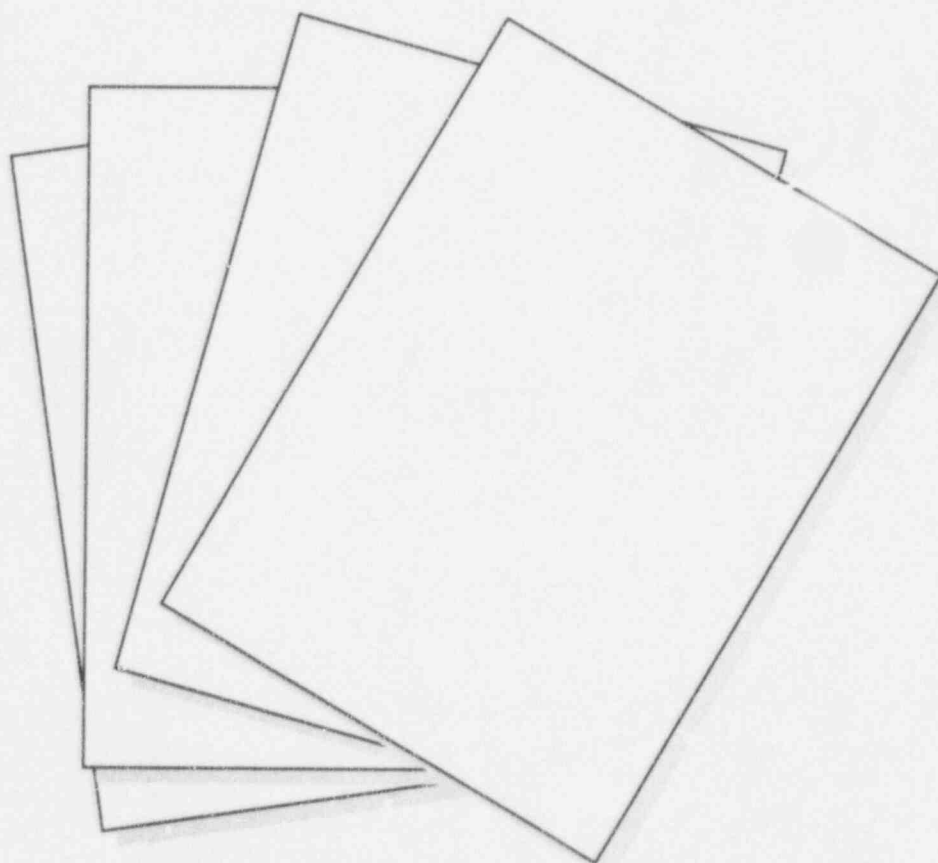
M Include a contact name and telephone number.

In this particular example, a phone number probably isn't necessary. In the letter shown at the top of the page, the writer of the incoming letter apparently already frequently calls NRC. Nonetheless, always including a contact name and phone number is a good writing habit, one that greatly enhances our responsiveness to the public.

Notes:



he Handy Handbook



Some Suggested Enclosures

When responding to questions or concerns from the public, you may find that enclosing existing NRC publications, fact sheets, brochures, or other material will save time and effort in explaining our responsibilities. You can also be sure that the information you are passing along has already been approved by NRC. The *NRC Information Digest* (NUREG-1350) is an excellent source for general data and descriptions of NRC activities. In addition, the Office of Public Affairs can provide copies of press releases on specific subjects and copies of speeches delivered by the Chairman and the Commissioners. You may order NUREGs and Fact Sheets by calling 202-512-2409 or 2249 or by sending an e-mail request to amcbride@gpo.gov. Other material listed below is available through the Office of Public Affairs.

A Brochures

Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards (NUREG/BR-0137)
The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NUREG/BR-0099)
NRC Organizational Chart (NUREG-0325)
NRC School Volunteer Program (NUREG/BR-0104)

Price-Anderson System (NUREG/BR-0079)
 NRC - Regulator of Nuclear Safety (NUREG/BR-0164)
 Working Safely with Nuclear Gauges (NUREG/BR-0133)
 Public Petition Process (2.206) (NUREG/BR-0200)

B Citizen's Guides

Citizen's Guide to NRC Information (NUREG/BR-0010, Rev. 2)
Guide to NRC Regulating Disposal of Low-Level Waste - 10 CFR Part 61

Guide to Open Meetings at NRC (NUREG/BR-0128)

C Fact Sheets

Reactor Licensing Process
Disposal of Radioactive Waste
NRC Role in High-Level Waste Management
U. S. Commercial Nuclear Power Plants and Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installations (Map)

Public Document Room Users' Guide (NUREG/BR-0004)
Dry Cask Storage of Spent Fuel From Nuclear Reactors
Transportation of Spent Fuel Plutonium

D Lists (found in the *NRC Information Digest*)

List of Addresses of Utilities Operating Power Reactors

Lists of Power Reactors in the U. S.

E Reports

NRC Report on Transporting Spent Fuel (NUREG/BR-0111)
 Excerpt from WASH-1250, *Safety of Nuclear Power Reactors*

NRC Annual Report to Congress (NUREG-1145)
NRC Information Digest (NUREG-1350), issued annually

Notes:

Titles in NRC Correspondence

Here are some examples of the proper use of titles in NRC correspondence. For a more comprehensive list, see Exhibit 4 in NRC Management Directive 3.57.

| Addressee | Address on Letter | Openings and Closings and Envelope |
|--|--|--|
| United States Senator | The Honorable (full name) United States Senate Washington, DC 20510 or The Honorable (full name) United States Senator (Local address) (Zip Code) | Dear Senator (surname): Sincerely, |
| Committee Chairman United States Senate | The Honorable (full name) Chairman, Committee on (name) United States Senate Washington, DC 20510 | Dear Mr. Chairman: Sincerely, |
| United States Representative | The Honorable (full name) United States House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515 or The Honorable (full name) Member, United States House of Representatives (Local address) (Zip Code) | Dear Congressman (surname): or Dear Congresswoman (surname): Sincerely, |
| Committee Chairman House of Representatives | The Honorable (full name) Chairman, Committee on (name) United States House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515 | Dear Mr. Chairman: or Dear Madam Chairman: Sincerely, |
| Professor | Dr. or Professor (full name) Department of (name) (Name of institution) (Local address) (Zip Code) | Dear Dr. (surname): or Dear Professor (surname): Sincerely, |
| Lawyer | Mr. or Ms. (full name) Attorney at Law (Local address) (Zip Code) or (Full name), Esq. (Local address) (Zip Code) | Dear Mr. or Ms. (surname): Sincerely, |
| One individual | Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Miss (Full name) (Local address) (Zip Code) | Dear Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Miss (surname): Sincerely, |

Titles in NRC Correspondence

| Addressee | Address on Letter and Envelope | Openings and Closings |
|-------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Two or more men | Mr. (full name) and Mr. (Full name) or Messrs. (full name) and (Full name) (Local address) (Zip Code) | Gentlemen: Sincerely, |
| Two or more women | Mrs., Ms., or Miss (full name) and Mrs., Ms., or Miss (Full name) (Local address) (Zip Code) | Ladies: Sincerely, |

For Other Situations

If you cannot determine from the name on the incoming correspondence if the writer is a man or a woman, use "Mr." in the address and "Dear Sir:" in the opening.

If a woman has not indicated how she wants to be addressed ("Mrs.," "Miss," or "Ms."), use "Ms." in the address and in the opening.

If a letter is from a group of two or more persons but is signed only by one person, address the reply to the individual who signed the incoming letter and reference the others in the opening paragraph.

Punctuation

Colons

■ introduce lists

Her division was responsible for the following:

- basic research
- confirmatory research
- written results

The test measures three areas of performance: management motives, management strengths, and leadership styles.

■ introduce an element to which the writer wants to call special attention

The director summarized the action that would be taken: after the document is approved, the licensee will be required to conform.

It was the worst winter of my life: every week brought snow, sleet, or ice.

■ follow a formal salutation

Dear Ms. Franklin:

Dear Senator Barnes:

■ separate certain numerical expressions

The ratio is 1:4.

He will arrive at 3:30 p.m.

Commas

■ separate items in a series, including adjectives

footnotes, references, and bibliographies

The team wrote the proposal, John edited it, and the division director signed it.

The book had a water-stained, frayed, gray binding.

Punctuation

Commas, Cont.

- **usually precede coordinating conjunctions that link the main clauses of a sentence**

The mall opens at 9 a. m., but the restaurant does not open until noon.

- **set off adverb clauses and introductory phrases at the beginning of sentences**

Yes, I will attend the Commission meeting.

After the review is complete, the director will sign the report.

- **set off items that are non-restrictive or parenthetical (that is, words or phrases that add information to the sentence but could be eliminated without altering the meaning of the sentence)**

The final rule, which was published on April 1, becomes effective July 1.

- **separate the name of a city and its State and the date and the year, but they are not used between month and year**

The meeting was held in Chicago, Illinois, on September 25, 1994.

We visited the site in September 1993.

My letter of January 20, 1995, was sent...

Dashes

- **set off a parenthetical expression (although they are rarely used in formal correspondence)**

There may be side effects — all bad — as a result of that decision.

The entire division — managers, engineers, administrative staff — attended.

Parentheses

- **set off explanatory material**

The inspector visited three of the four Regions (I, III, and IV).

- The high-level waste regulation (10 CFR Part 60) establishes the requirements for site characterization of a geologic repository.

- **set off letters or numbers that designate items in a series**

At the meeting, we will (1) read the minutes, (2) discuss the parking rules, and (3) vote on the recommendation.

- **set off a reference, citation, abbreviation, or acronym**

The results (see Figure 2) are quite surprising.

Our predecessor agency was the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC).

Periods

- **end declarative sentences**

I read the report.

- **are used after abbreviations when the abbreviation without the period would spell a word**

gal., in. *but* ft, yd

Semicolons

- **separate main clauses when they are not linked by a coordinating conjunction**

He agrees; I do not.

The inspector removed several samples from the crate; the forklift operator then stored the crate.

- **separate items in a series that contain commas**

The inspector interviewed the forklift driver, the health physicist, and the doctor; recorded each interview; and sent a copy of each transcript to the Offices of Investigation, the Inspector General, and the General Counsel.

Word Usage

Accept/Except

Accept is a verb meaning to consent to or to agree to. **Except** is a preposition meaning to exclude.

You must *accept* the responsibility that goes with the appointment.

We agreed on everything *except* the schedule.

Advice/Advise

Advice is a noun that means counsel or suggestion. **Advise** is a verb that means to offer advice.

My *advice* is to sign the contract immediately.

I *advise* you to sign the contract immediately.

Affect/Effect

Affect is a verb that means to influence. **Effect** as a noun means a result. **Effect** as a verb means to bring about.

The public utility commission's decisions *affect* all State utilities.

These policy changes had a good *effect* on staff morale.

The new manager *effected* several changes to the policy.

Among/Between

Between applies to interactions between two persons or things. **Among** applies to interaction involving three or more.

This discussion is *between* you and me.

The three technicians discussed the test results *among* themselves before presenting their findings.

Assure/Ensure

Assure means to set a person's mind to rest; it is used with people. **Ensure** means to secure from harm; it is used with things.

I can *assure* you that the document will arrive on schedule.

During the meeting, the speaker *assured* the audience that she would answer all their questions.

Adhering to this maintenance schedule will *ensure* proper operation of the system.

Because/Since

Because expresses a causal relationship. **Since** expresses time, as well as circumstances and conditions.

He did not attend the meeting *because* he was called away on an emergency.

Since 1988, the agency picnic has been held in September.

Since I left the office early, I missed your telephone call.

Due to/Because of

Due to (meaning caused by) is used with a form of *to be* and modifies a noun. **Due to** does not mean *because of* and should not be used to begin a sentence.

The delay was *due to* an automobile accident.

The delay, which was *due to* an accident, resulted in a schedule change.

Because of the delay, the schedule was changed.

Word Usage

Either/Neither

***Either* means one of two; *neither* is its negative form. Use *either* or *neither* when only two persons or ideas or things are involved. Use *or* with *either*; use *nor* with *neither*.**

Either we complete the proposal today *or* we lose the opportunity to win the contract.

Neither the first *nor* second design will be used.

Farther/Further

***Farther* refers to distance. *Further* refers to time, degree, or quantity.**

Each reorganization moves your office *farther* from mine.

Adding examples *further* improves the guide's usefulness.

Fewer/Less

***Fewer* refers to units or individuals that can be counted. *Less* refers to mass, bulk, or ideas that cannot be counted.**

Fewer people attend the annual meeting each year.

We sell *fewer* copies of the paper each day.

Less activity than predicted was visible around Jupiter's moon.

As Mr. Jones gained more experience, dealing with personnel issues became *less* difficult.

Practical/Practicable

***Practical* applies to something that has already been done, that is known to be possible. *Practicable* applies to something that may be possible but has not yet been tried.**

The director asked us to consider several *practical* plans to improve public responsiveness.

The innovative design for the secure doorway is believed to be *practicable*.

Principal/Principle

***Principal* means the head or chief. *Principle* means a basic truth or standard.**

The president of the company was the *principal* speaker.

We make monthly payments on the *principal* of the loan.

We follow the *Principles* of Good Regulation.

Prior/Before

***Prior* modifies a noun. *Prior to* must follow a form of *to be* and functions as a predicate adjective. *Before* is an adverb.**

The agreement signed today replaces the *prior* agreement.

The report arrived *before* the letter.

Shall/Must/Should/May/May Not -

In regulations, *shall* indicates a requirement, *may* indicates an option, and *may not* indicates a prohibition. *Shall* is used with individuals or organizations; *must* is used with inanimate objects. In guidance, such as Regulatory Guides, *should* often indicates suggested use.

The licensee *shall* check the operation of reusable collection systems each month.

The instruction *must* describe the licensee's procedures.

Word Usage

A licensee *may not* administer that dose to humans.

The licensee *should* conduct these drills before conducting the actual test.

That/Which

That begins a restrictive clause that is a *necessary part* of the complete sentence. ***Which*** begins a non-restrictive clause that adds information but is *not* a *necessary part* of the complete sentence.

Training on a simulator ensures a degree of competence *that* cannot be learned otherwise.

She walked to the warehouse, *which* is a mile away, to pick up the supplies.

The Quality of Correspondence Working Group

Walter Oliu, Office of Administration, Chairman

Juanita Beeson, Office of Administration

Margo Bridgers, Office of the Executive Director for Operations

Louise Gallagher, Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research

Mindy Landau, Office of Public Affairs

Donald Loosley, Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards

Robert McOsker, Office of the Chairman

R. Carol Norsworthy, Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Edward Oklessen, Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research

Linda Portner, Office of Congressional Affairs

Ann Thomas, Office of the Executive Director for Operations



Federal Recycling Program

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NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, DC 20555-0001

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